New poll shows uptick in support for Ottawa's carbon price after Trudeau announced tax rebates

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Byline: Alex Ballingall

Body

OTTAWA—A new poll suggests Canadians warmed to the federal government's carbon price plan after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced most people hit by Ottawa's fuel levy would get rebates that outweigh the cost of the tax.

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey of 1,500 Canadian adults from Oct. 24 to 29, the six days after Trudeau unveiled details of the Liberal government's plan to deter greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change with a price on carbon. A slim majority of respondents — 54 per cent — said they support the carbon price plan, while 46 per cent said they oppose it.

That's a nine-point uptick from an Angus Reid poll in July, when 45 per cent supported the federal carbon price and 55 per cent opposed it.

The latest survey also found support for the carbon price in Ontario — where Progressive Conservative Premier Doug Ford is campaigning against the new levy on fuel — jumped by 11 points from 43 per cent in July to 52 per cent last week.

A randomized poll with this sample size carries a margin of error of plus/minus 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Angus Reid executive director Shachi Kurl said that, while there appears to be a bump in support for Trudeau's carbon price, her data shows Canadians remain starkly divided on the issue. She pointed to how her poll shows 80 per cent of respondents who voted Conservative in 2015 oppose the carbon price plan, while 71 per cent of Liberal voters and 69 per cent of NDP voters support the plan.

"It is very much a tale of two countries, and a tale of two views on this issue," Kurl said.

"I think we have to wait and see whether that slight uptick in support holds."

A separate survey published Tuesday also suggests support for the carbon price plan has gone up recently. Almost half (47 per cent) of respondents to an online survey conducted Oct. 26 to 28 by Innovative Research Group said they "strongly" or "somewhat" support the federal carbon price plan — up from 35 per cent in July. Innovative Research Group President Greg Lyle said he expected the policy to be more divisive in provinces like Ontario, where 45 per cent of respondents backed the plan.

The weighted representative sample of 1,200 Canadian adults were from the same panel Innovative Research uses for monthly public affairs research, Lyle said.

“We actually found pretty broad initial acceptance,” he said, pointing to how even some Conservative supporters — those who don’t include themselves in the anti-elite Conservative camp — also seemed to be split on the carbon price. “That’s why, initially, it’s not having the political effect that you think it would.”

In 2016, Ottawa ordered provinces and territories to come up with their own carbon pricing schemes that meet federal standards, or risk having the federal plan imposed in their jurisdictions. Trudeau announced last week that the federal plan would be imposed in four provinces that refused to devise their own pricing systems that Ottawa deemed adequate: Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick.

Trudeau also said all revenues from the carbon levy will be returned directly to residents of those provinces through new “climate action incentive” rebates that will outweigh the extra costs to gasoline, home heating and other purchases.

Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer, along with premiers in Ontario and Saskatchewan, attacked the plan as a tax grab in disguise, and cast doubt on Trudeau’s claim that most people wouldn’t lose money to the carbon levy. Those provinces are also challenging Ottawa in court over whether it has the authority to impose the levy in their jurisdictions.

Alex Ballingall is an Ottawa-based reporter covering national politics. Follow him on Twitter: @aballinga

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